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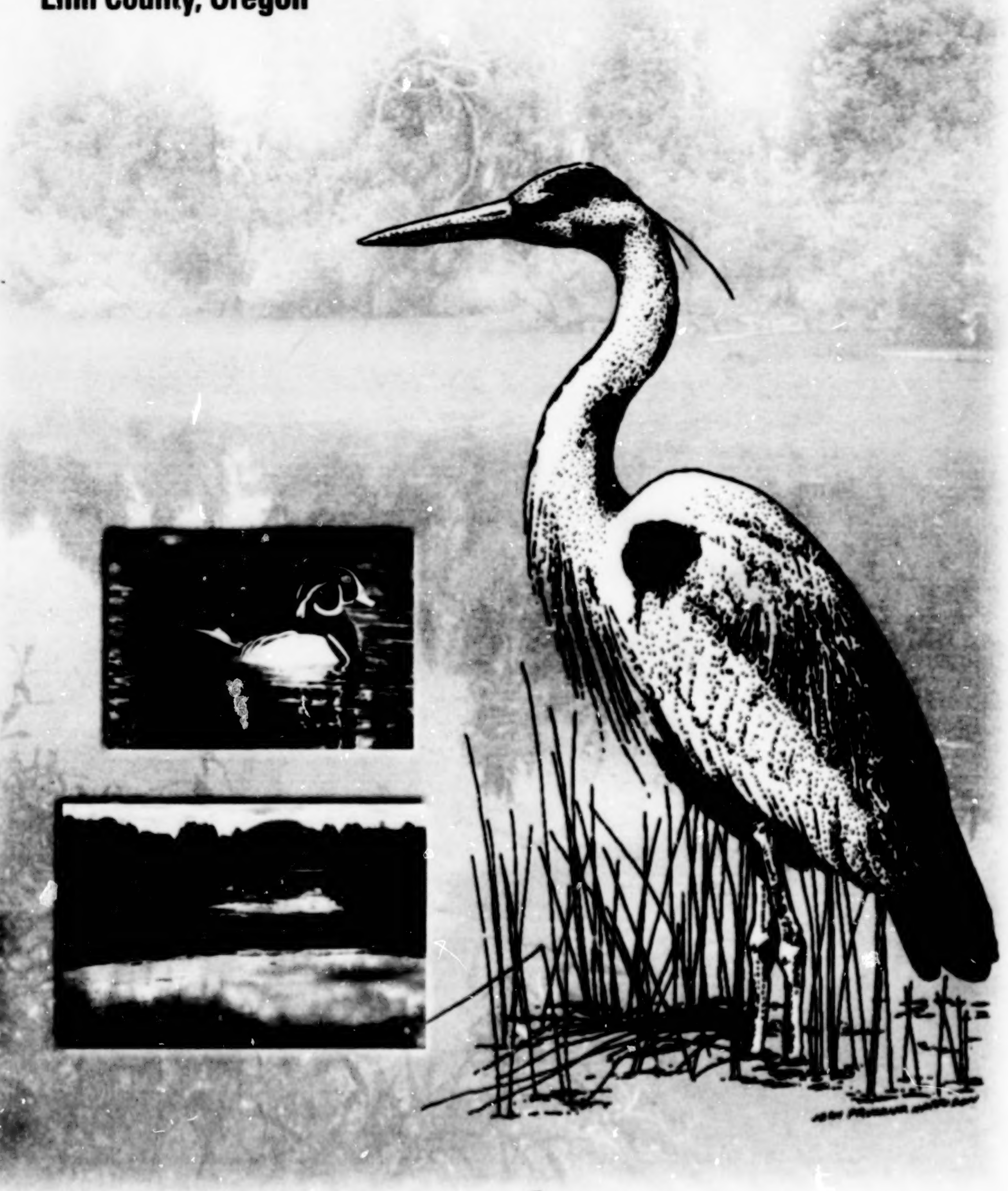
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Conceptual Management Plan

Proposed Snag Boat Bend Addition to the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge

Linn County, Oregon



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Proposed Snag Boat Bend Addition to the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge Linn County, Oregon

Prepared by

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December 1999

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM 1
- MISSION OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM 1
- GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM 1
- GOALS OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM 3
- PLANNING EFFORTS 3
- PURPOSE OF THE WILLIAM L. FINLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE 4
- GOALS OF THE SNAG BOAT BEND UNIT 4

REFUGE ADMINISTRATION 4

KEY AREAS OF MANAGEMENT FOCUS 5
- HABITAT MANAGEMENT 6
- POPULATION MONITORING 8

PUBLIC USE & WILDLIFE-DEPENDENT RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES 8
- REFUGES ARE PRIMARY USE AREAS. 8
- THE COMPATIBILITY STANDARD 9
- INTERIM COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION 9

LAW ENFORCEMENT 10

FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT 10

INTERAGENCY AND PUBLIC COORDINATION 11

LIST OF PREPARERS 11

FIGURES

Figure 1. Location of the Snag Boat Bend Unit and the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge 2

Figure 2. Habitats at the Snag Boat Bend Unit 7

TABLES

Table 1. Interim Compatibility Matrix 9

CONCEPTUAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
SNAG BOAT BEND UNIT

William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge
Linn County, Oregon

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this Conceptual Management Plan (CMP) to provide landowners, government agencies, and the interested public with a general understanding of the management approaches being considered for the proposed Snag Boat Bend Unit (Unit) of the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The CMP presents a broad overview of the Service's proposed management for wildlife and their habitats, public uses and wildlife-dependent recreational activities, facilities, public outreach and law enforcement within the Unit (Figure 1). The Service developed this CMP during the land acquisition planning process. The proposed management actions will apply only to lands included within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The National Wildlife Refuge System (System) is the worlds largest and most diverse collection of lands specifically set aside for wildlife. The first national wildlife refuge was established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 at Pelican Island in Florida. The System now has over 500 refuges that protect over 92 million acres of land. There is at least one refuge in every state.

MISSION OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The mission of the System is to preserve a national network of lands and waters for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources of the United States for the benefit of present and future generations. The Service is the primary Federal agency responsible for managing migratory birds, endangered plants and animals, certain marine mammals, and anadromous fish.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

- **Habitat**. Fish and wildlife will not prosper without high-quality habitat, and without fish and wildlife, traditional uses of refuges cannot be sustained. The Refuge System will continue to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitat within refuges.

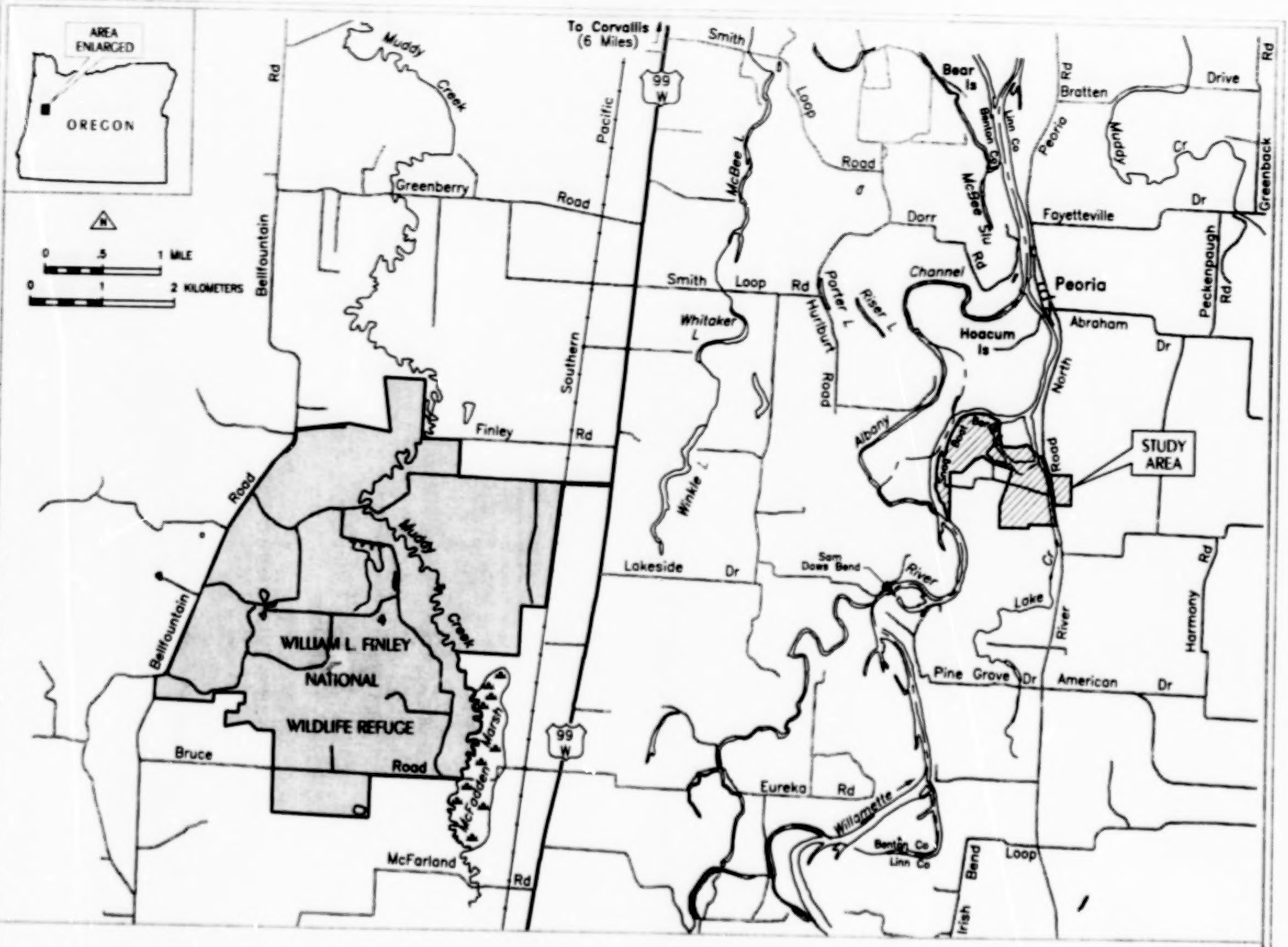


Figure 1. The Snag Boat Bend Unit of the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge.

- **Public Use**. The Refuge System provides important opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities involving environmental education and interpretation, wildlife observation and photography, and fishing and hunting.

- **Partnerships**. America's sportsmen and women were the first partners who insisted on protecting valuable wildlife habitat within wildlife refuges. Conservation partnerships with other Federal agencies, State and local agencies, Tribes, private organizations, industry, and the general public can make significant contributions to the growth and management of the Refuge System.

- **Public Involvement**. The public should be given a full and open opportunity to participate in decisions regarding acquisition and management of our National Wildlife Refuges.

GOALS OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System are to:

- Preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems (when practicable), all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered;

- Perpetuate the migratory bird resource;

- Preserve a natural diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on refuge lands;

- Provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and the human's role in the environment;

- Provide refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome, and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent that these activities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

PLANNING EFFORTS

The Service has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Land Protection Plan (LPP) for the addition of the Snag Boat Bend Unit to the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge. If the preferred alternative is selected, the Refuge would be expanded to include the 341 acre Snag Boat Bend Unit. The EA addresses the environmental consequences of expanding the Refuge boundary and the acquisition of the Unit from a willing seller. The LPP provides a summary of the proposed action and identifies the tract to be acquired.

The Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 requires that a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) be prepared for all National Wildlife Refuges. Between now and 2012, every refuge in the country will prepare or update a 15-year CCP to guide its management and operation. Each plan will be developed with the participation of citizens, elected leaders, and interested groups. This CMP provides an interim guide for managing the Snag Boat Bend Unit until the CCP for the William L. Finley Refuge is completed.

PURPOSE OF THE WILLIAM L. FINLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1964 under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, as amended, "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds."

GOALS OF THE SNAG BOAT BEND UNIT

The following primary goals of the Snag Boat Bend Unit reflect the core mission of the Service to protect fish and wildlife resources of national importance while providing opportunities for the public to appreciate and enjoy the natural heritage of the region.

- Provide high-quality wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl especially dabbling ducks (emphasizing mallards and wood ducks), Canada geese, and tundra swans..

- Protect, restore, and develop a diversity of habitats for all migratory birds such as neotropical songbirds, raptors, wading birds, and shorebirds.

- Protect, restore, and develop habitats for and otherwise support recovery of Federally listed endangered and threatened species and help prevent the listing of candidate species and species of management concern.

- Protect and restore a diversity of native habitats for indigenous fish, wildlife, invertebrates, and plant species of the Willamette Valley ecosystem.

- Provide high-quality opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education to enhance public appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of Refuge fish, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources.

REFUGE ADMINISTRATION

The Unit would be administered as a part of the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex). The Complex includes three Willamette Valley refuges: Ankeny, Baskett Slough, and William L. Finley. The headquarters for the Complex is at the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, south of Corvallis, Oregon.

If the Unit is acquired, funds for its operation and maintenance would be needed. Management funds would be needed for new staff, administrative support, program and facility development, and maintenance. Refuge program and staff development is expected to take place gradually over a period of years, and would reflect the availability of funds appropriated by Congress to support the Refuge. In the interim, the Service usually provides limited start-up funding from current appropriations. These start-up funds are generally not adequate to immediately develop facilities and programs at the Unit.

Because of the time lag between land acquisition and base funding for operations and maintenance on newly acquired lands, it may appear that the Service is more interested in land acquisition than in implementing programs for wildlife stewardship and public use. The interim start-up period provides both the Service and the public with an opportunity to ensure that the new Unit is developed with sound planning to conserve wildlife and to meet the local communities' and the nation's expectations for quality programs.

The budget for the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, including the Snag Boat Bend Unit, should include funds for salaries, facilities, capital improvements, equipment and infrastructure, maintenance, biological surveys, habitat restoration, and supplies. It is expected that a new Assistant Refuge Manager and maintenance worker would be needed for the Unit. Staff from the Complex would be available to provide limited administrative, biological, law enforcement, public use, environmental education and maintenance expertise. Whenever possible, the talents and skills of volunteers would be used for specific management projects.

Initial work such as boundary posting, general maintenance, building maintenance and removal, and topographical, biological, hydrological, and cultural resource surveys associated with plans for habitat restoration activities is estimated to cost $350,000. Estimates for wetland restoration have yet to be determined, but several partner groups have already expressed interest in working with the Refuge Complex on habitat restoration. Once necessary restoration activities have been completed, funding would also be needed to support annual operations at the Unit. Annual costs to support operations is estimated at $300,000.

When fully developed, shop, storage facilities, parking lots, and interpretive displays would be needed at the Unit. Existing buildings on the acquired property could be used for shop and storage facilities after major repairs are performed in order to meet Federal safety standards. The Service would seek to build a visitor kiosk or other suitable structure to provide environmental education, interpretation, and wildlife viewing and photography opportunities.

KEY AREAS OF MANAGEMENT FOCUS

In order to accomplish the Service's primary goal of providing high quality wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl, various habitat management activities, for example, wetland restoration and management and cropland production would be emphasized. Other key areas of management focus would include biological population monitoring, public use and wildlife-dependent activities, law enforcement, facilities development and management, and interagency and public coordination.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

The size of the proposed Unit is about 341 acres. Habitat management on the Unit would focus on the enhancement and restoration of freshwater wetlands and the production of agricultural crops to provide for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife species. There are several types of wetland and upland habitat on the Unit (Figure 2).

Freshwater Wetlands and Croplands. Conservation management of wetlands and croplands by the previous landowner has contributed to large increases to the number of migratory waterfowl using the area. Thousands of ducks, primarily mallards, northern pintail, American widgeon, green-winged teal, and northern shovelers concentrate at times on the property and surrounding areas during the fall, winter, and spring. Canada goose numbers have increased over the past few years. Last year, 10,000 geese, primarily cacklers, were regularly present on the Unit during March and April. Tundra swans also use the area during the fall and winter. Mallards, cinnamon teal and wood ducks breed on the study area. Interim management activities would focus on enhancing the existing wetlands, restoring several other historic wetlands, and modifying the farming program to benefit wildlife, especially migratory waterfowl.

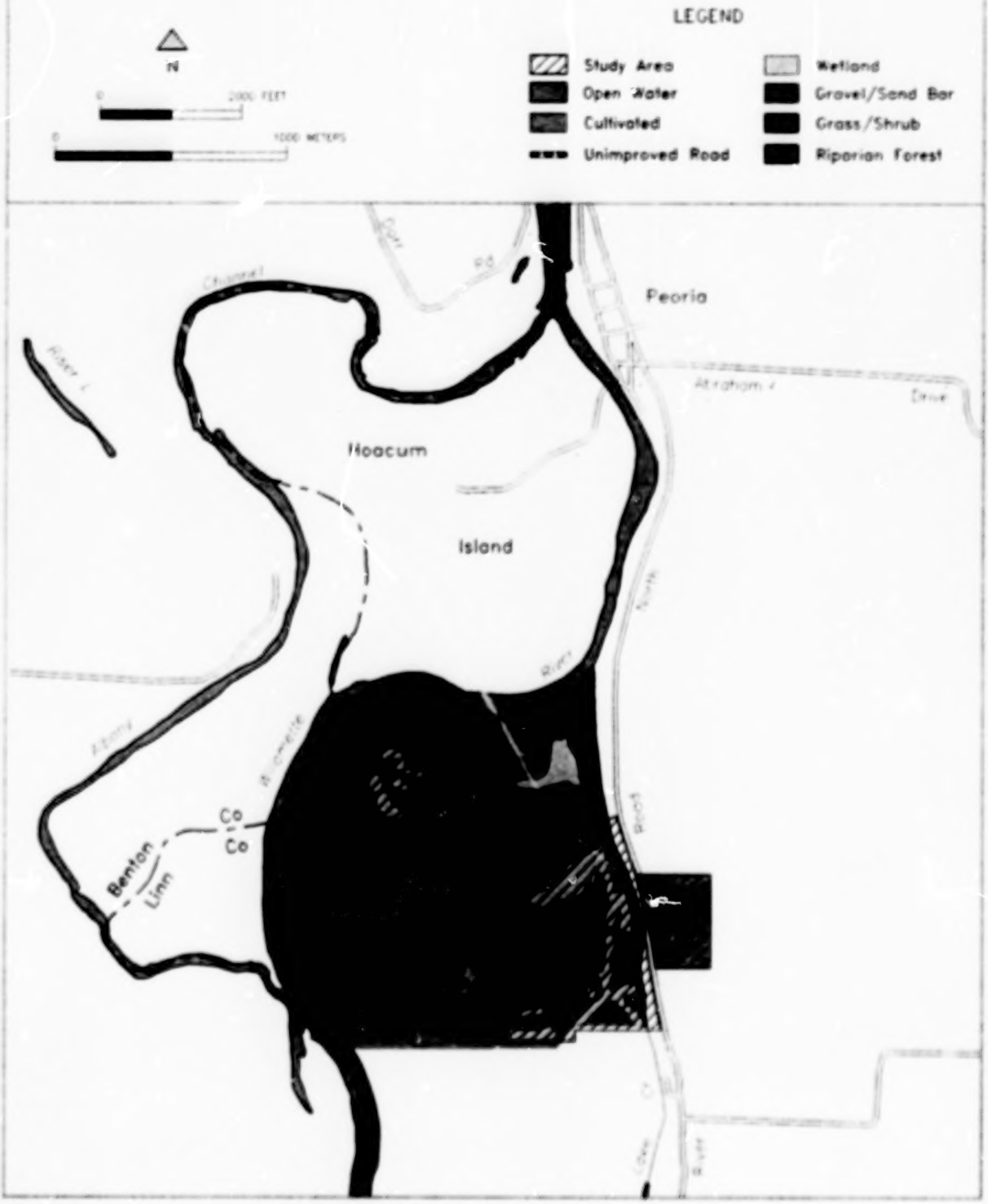
Riparian Forest/Shrub. About 70 acres of palustrine forest dominated by black cottonwood and 20 acres of palustrine scrub habitat dominated by willows and other hydrophytic shrubs occur on the proposed Unit. These riparian forest and shrub habitats support a diversity of native passerine birds and the greatest number of neotropical migrant birds of all habitats in Oregon. Fifty-six percent of all neotropical migrant birds in Oregon are associated with riparian habitats. The alteration and/or loss of this forest habitat has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on neotropical migrant birds.

In addition to passerine birds, the black cottonwood forest supports a great blue heron rookery and nesting red-tailed hawks. It also provides roost areas for bald eagles and osprey that nest nearby. The downed timber furnishes a complex structure on the forest floor for native reptiles and amphibians. Black-tailed deer are also common in the area. Interim management of these areas would focus on maintenance of the existing habitat values for these species, and expansion of riparian areas through new planting efforts.

Open Water Habitats. The proposed Unit lies between the Willamette River and a series of backwater sloughs at the mouth of Lake Creek. These open water areas include unconsolidated shore and bottom, and emergent non-persistent wetland habitats. Their total area and surface configuration depends upon water levels, but averages about 20 acres. Up to six acres of gravel and sand may be exposed along the Willamette River during dry periods.

These backwater sloughs provide important habitat for native mammals, including beaver, muskrat, mink, and river otter. However, the most significant value of these wetlands is to native reptiles and amphibians, specifically western pond turtles and red-legged frogs, both considered species of concern by the Service. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife considers the turtle one of the highest priority species in the Willamette Valley. Protection of

Figure 2. Habitat types of the proposed Snag Boat Bend Unit



nesting habitat adjacent to suitable aquatic habitat, and protection of nests from predation, are key to recovery of western pond turtles. During Service visits to the study area, observers counted up to 15 turtles basking on artificial platforms in the northern slough; the previous landowner reported counting over 35 in the same area. This slough is near an area of sparsely vegetated grassland, a habitat turtles prefer for nesting.

The proposed Unit could be extremely important for western pond turtles if nesting is occurring or if nesting habitat could be developed and secured. Red-legged frogs are present on the proposed Unit, not only in the backwater slough/riparian areas but also in the restored wetlands. Interim management activities in these habitats will emphasize maintenance and enhancement of existing habitat values for these species of concern.

POPULATION MONITORING

Biological surveys would be needed to:

- assess the status of endangered, threatened, or rare species;
- establish baseline population information for fish, wildlife, and plants; and,
- monitor short- and long-term wildlife responses to habitat enhancement and management.

PUBLIC USE & WILDLIFE-DEPENDENT RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

As part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the proposed Snag Boat Bend Unit of the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge would provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreational uses that are compatible with Refuge purposes. The location of the Unit in the southern Willamette Valley allows the Service an opportunity to provide several nearby communities with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the area's unique wildlife heritage and to enjoy the open spaces of the Refuge.

REFUGES ARE PRIMARY USE AREAS.

Unlike most lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, or the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, national wildlife refuges are not multiple-use lands. On national wildlife refuges, wildlife purposes are always the primary land use. However, the Service promotes certain wildlife-dependent recreational activities including wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation, and fishing and hunting, whenever these uses are compatible with the purposes of the refuge unit. The Service is committed to providing high-quality, safe and accessible wildlife-dependent public uses at the Snag Boat Bend Unit of the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge. The ability to provide for these interim uses will be limited, however, until additional funding is available for facility development.

THE COMPATIBILITY STANDARD

National laws and policies provide guidance and the planning framework to insure that Americans can enjoy their National Wildlife Refuge System while protecting these special lands from incompatible or harmful human activities. Guidance is derived from the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, the Refuge Recreation Act, and Executive Order 12996. Key issues of compatibility, availability of funds and staff, and prohibited activities are discussed in this Conceptual Management Plan.

Before activities or uses are allowed on a National Wildlife Refuge, federal law requires that they be formally determined to be ". . . *compatible* with the major purposes for which such areas were established . . ." (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended). If a use will not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes for which the unit was established, it is a compatible use. All public entry and use of Refuge lands are at the discretion of the Refuge Manager, who is responsible for making the compatibility determination. For recreational uses to be allowed, a Refuge Manager must further determine that the uses are practicable, will not interfere with the purposes for which the area was established, and funds are available for the development, operation, and maintenance of these permitted forms of recreation (Refuge Recreation Act of 1962). If the proposed use is found to be compatible, the use may be authorized by the Refuge Manager when management funds and staff are available and other pertinent laws, regulations, and policies are satisfied.

INTERIM COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

The Service has completed an interim compatibility determination which assessed the existing wildlife-dependent public use activities for compatibility with the purposes for which the Refuge was established (Table 1). The compatibility determination covers the interim period of time between Service acquisition of a parcel and formal adoption of a long-term management plan (CCP).

All of the lands within the proposed Unit are privately owned. There are no wildlife-dependent recreational activities open to the general public that occur on lands within the Snag Boat Bend Unit. Wildlife observation takes place on a limited basis from Peoria Road, which cuts through the eastern part of the Unit. Some waterfowl hunting by private individuals has taken place in the past on the land (with permission of the previous owner) and from water along Lake Creek and its backwaters. Waterfowl hunters have traditionally used areas under ordinary high water for access from the Willamette River during designated waterfowl hunting seasons.

Accordingly, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation have been determined to be compatible and would be allowed on a managed basis. No hunting or fishing would be allowed on the property above the ordinary high-water line or from non-navigable waters. Hunting or fishing in these areas would not be compatible due to the disturbance this activity would create and the resultant loss of wildlife, especially waterfowl use.

Allowing hunting within these areas would not allow the Service to meet the goal of providing high quality wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl.

Table 1. Interim Compatibility Determination Matrix for Snag Boat Bend Unit Addition to William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge.

Wildlife-Dependent Recreational Activity	Existing Activity?	Compatible for Interim Period?	Funds and Staff Available to Manage?	Interim Use Allowed?
Wildlife Observation	*No*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*[1]
Wildlife Photography	*No*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*[1]
Environmental Interpretation	*No*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*[1]
Environmental Education	*No*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*[1]
Hunting (land-based or within non-navigable waters)	*No*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*
Fishing (within non-navigable waters)	*No*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*

[1] The ability to provide for these interim uses will be limited under current staffing and funding levels.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement of federal laws on the Refuge is important to safeguard visitors, conserve and protect natural resources, and protect public and private property. Current Refuge staff includes law enforcement personnel, and the new Assistant Refuge Manager that would be assigned to the Unit would also have law enforcement authority. Refuge officers would work closely with other federal authorities, the Linn County Sheriff's Department, Oregon State Police, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to control trespass, violations of wildlife laws, and other violations of law.

FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Boundaries of the property, if acquired by the Service, will be posted with refuge signs at regular intervals to provide the public with knowledge of specific boundary locations. There are several structures on the property including storage, and seed cleaning facilities. Existing facilities would be used to the extent needed for refuge operations after federal safety standards are met. If the buildings cannot be brought to federal standards at reasonable cost, they will be torn down and removed. Parking lots and interpretive displays would need to be developed.

INTERAGENCY AND PUBLIC COORDINATION

The Unit lies within a designated Greenway along the Willamette River and adjacent to private lands in Linn County, creating an opportunity to work closely with private landowners, various public groups, and other agencies to initiate a coordinated approach to resource management in the area. Opportunities include, but are not limited to, cooperative research activities, public education and interpretation programs, and other public use oriented programs. The Service will pursue partnerships with other federal, state, and local agencies, conservation and nonprofit groups, and private landowners to meet mutual goals and objectives wherever possible.

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02-28-00